THE PRETTY VICTIM SANG A HYMN TO HER KILLER!

JANUARY • 75¢

TRUE DETECTIVE

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How homicide sleuths solved the BIZARRE STRANGLING OF THE 'NASTY' NYMPHO!

Exclusive Double-Length Feature on

FRANK ABAGNALE- LAST OF THE GREAT IMPOSTERS

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FRANK WILLIAMS was handsome, debonair, impeccably groomed, smarter than an egg-sucking hound and as glib as an Irish horse trader.

He was a millionaire twice over and half again before he was 21.

He stole every nickel of it. And he used the bulk of the bundle partying in every capital in Europe, living it up in South America and the Orient, and treating himself to beautiful threads, gourmet foods, choice wines, fine lodgings, foxy ladies (scads of them) and other sensual goodies.

It wasn't altogether a relaxing life. Frank Williams didn't exactly keep his finger on the panic button, but he put a lot of mileage on his running shoes. He made a lot of exits through side doors, across rooftops and down fire escapes, and abandoned more wardrobes in five years than most men acquire over a lifetime. Williams was slippier than a Vaselined shoat—until he was degreased by some hard-nosed New York detectives.

Frank Abagnale, a handsome and debonair Houston, Texas, businessman, did six months in a French pokey, six months in a Swedish slammer and four years in an American federal jug because of Williams' sinful ways.

Abagnale isn't bitter at all. Abagnale *was* Frank Williams, alias Robert Conrad, Frank Adams, Joe Davis, and Frank Masterson, among other phony monikers. Ersatz airline pilot, assistant Louisiana State's Attorney, FBI agent, pediatrician, stockbroker, and college professor, among other professional false fronts. He was also known to the police of 29 foreign countries and all 50 states as "The Skywayman," one of this century's cleverest bum-check artists and flimflam men. The sobriquet was hung on Frank by an admiring New York reporter. Frank is big in the Big Apple.

"The FBI says I cashed $2,500,000 worth of fraudulent checks during my paperhanging career," Abagnale says with rueful candor. "I didn't keep any books, just a rough mental tally, but the figure sounds reasonable.

"I know the IRS hit me with some $750,000 in back income taxes and penalties." Abagnale paid the tax tab from moneys he'd squirreled away for just such a contingency. We told you he was smart, didn't we?

Today, looking like a stuffy young broker in vested business suits and with a paid-in-full (well, almost) receipt for his misdeeds in his pocket, Abagnale is making a legitimate living through a variation on the same theme. He isn't getting rich, but he's catching up on his sleep.

Frank Abagnale is now a white-collar crime specialist, head of his own firm, and he garners a nice income teaching bankers, retailers, merchants, businessmen and industrialists how to guard their cash drawers against guys like he used to be. The FBI, which has a Britannica-sized dossier on Abagnale, confirms that his qualifications to instruct in such matters are eminent.

Frank Abagnale makes numerous appearances before law enforcement groups, organized crime units, college criminology classes, business seminars and even civic groups, lecturing on internal fraud and theft, hot checks, phony cashier's checks and credentials, credit card manipulations and other illegal means of obtaining money, goods and services. How it's done, who's doing it, how to stop it.

Abagnale is literally *living up* his past, as a means of enchancing his image as a valuable soldier in the war on nonviolent crime, which costs consumers in America $14,500,000,000. That's right, fourteen and one-half *billions*, not millions. The

by STAN REDDING

TD DOUBLE-LENGTH FEATURE

original victims, of course, are businessmen, but guess who actually picks up the tab in the form of increased costs. You.

"I think I'm in a unique position to cut those losses," Abagnale observes. "There is more than a little truth in the old maxim, 'Set a thief to catch a thief.' I am no longer a thief myself, but I know all the ways and means used by thieves.

"Of course, I'd like to see myself established, not as a famous former con man, but as an authority in the field of white-collar crime."

Hardly a day passes in the Houston metropolitan area that Abagnale's status as such an authority isn't enhanced and enlarged.

Recently, a young woman sales clerk in one of Houston's most prestigious department stores appeared nervously before her department manager. "Excuse me, sir, but I have a customer who has made over $200 in purchases, and he wishes to pay for them, and receive change, from this cashier's check," the girl said. She handed over a check for $383.00.

The manager scrutinized the instrument. "Does he have identification?"

"Yes. sir. he has one of our credit cards, a gold seal card, and a driver's license, plus other credit cards," said the girl.

The manager peered discreetly at the nonchalantly waiting customer, a man in his mid-40s dressed in obviously-expensive clothes. "Cash it," growled the manager. "That's probably one of our big accounts. Use some judgement, young lady."

The girl turned, then wheeled to face the manager. "But, sir, Mr. Abagnale says any bona fide check should have at least one perforated edge, and this type should have four perforated edges. It's perfectly smooth!"

"Mr. Who?" exclaimed the manager. "Oh, hell . . ." and he dialed the credit department. The store had no such account. The manager called the bank that had issued the purported check. "It's phony, we've got $4,000 or $5,000 in the damned things now."

The manager summoned a store detective, who held the man for police, who found a whole suitcase full of phony credit cards, other ID and $70,000 in the bogus checks in the man's car.

"No, I didn't know him," laughs Abagnale. "But the girl got a promotion and I got the store as an account."

Abagnale soft-sells himself to prospective clients, but he's capable of making a hard point when he has to. The woman vice-president of a suburban bank was dubious of Abagnale's value to her bank, frankly skeptical that he'd reformed. "Our people are highly trained," the executive said firmly. "*You* would not be able to bilk one of them."

Abagnale smiled his gentle smile. "Tell you what, lady, I'll show you how easy it is, and take $200 from any teller you point out. All you have to do is walk with me through the lobby, and when I tell you goodbye, come back here. Okay?"

The woman smiled. "All right, that girl at the end of the cages. She has never been deceived."

Abagnale strolled with the vice-president toward the lobby door and then stopped in front of the teller's cage, less than ten feet distant. "Listen, Jenny, it's been nice seeing you again, and I'm sorry you couldn't have lunch," Abagnale purred, and kissed the vice-president on the cheek. "Come see us, hear?" He turned and started toward the door and the executive walked back to her office.

Abagnale had taken but a few steps, however, when he turned, picked a temporary check blank off a lobby counter, filled it out for $200 and walked to the teller.

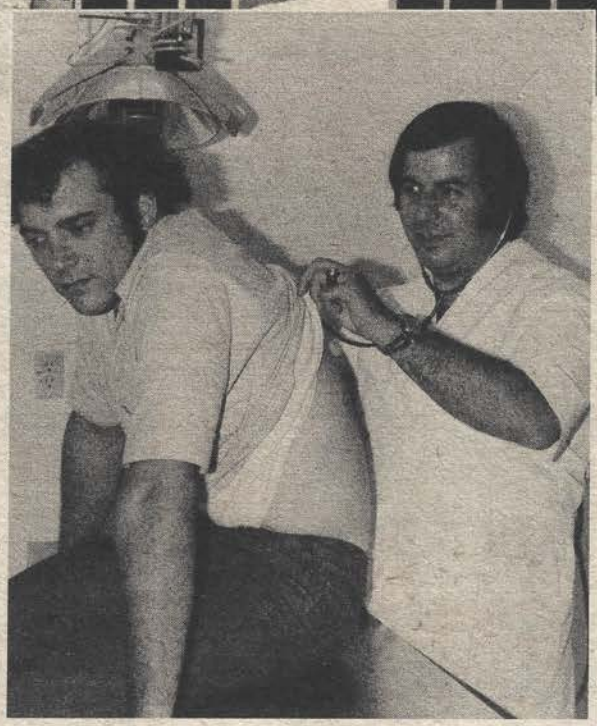
"Hi," he said cheerfully. "You know, I left my checkbook at home, and I'm out of cash. Can you cash this for me? I've got suitable identification, I think."

The teller, who had taken in Abagnale's

It may sound like a fanciful tale from another era, but it's not. Timely as this morning's headlines, this is the incredible but true story of

FRANK ABAGNALE
LAST OF THE GREAT IMPOSTORS

"Will the real Frank Abagnale please stand up!" Imposter fooled To Tell The Truth panel. Right, Frank once posed as college professor at Brigham Young University. Below, he is shown as "Dr. Frank Adams" at work



whole encounter with the vice-president, smiled. "No need, sir, here you are," and she counted out $200 in $20 bills.

Abagnale walked over and handed the vice-president the money. "There's a dozen other tricks that work just as well, and without my even knowing you or any other officer of this bank," said Abagnale.

He has the bank as a client now.

Abagnale's knowledge will soon benefit businessmen worldwide. He is under contract to Langlois Communications Inc., a Houston-based documentary film company with an international reputation. The firm is currently starring Abagnale in a series of eight educational shorts on white-collar crime prevention, and the mini-series will be distributed around the globe to banks, hotels, department stores, industries and other prime targets of fraudulent check swindlers.

"Frank has to be one of the great hoaxers of modern times," said Leo Langlois, head of the film firm and a former producer and director for both MGM and Columbia. "For sheer audacity, he ranks with Ferdinand DeMara and Stephen Weinberg."

DeMara, "The Great Impostor," gained fame in the '50s and '60s when, using assumed names and phony credentials, he palmed himself off in such professional roles as Royal Canadian Navy surgeon, assistant warden of a Texas prison unit, boys' school headmaster, college professor and consultant in various fields.

Weinberg, in his salad days, the post-World War I era, had few peers as a poseur.

Among other exploits, he successfully passed himself off as a visiting foreign admiral and received a 15-gun salute from the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. He attached himself to Egyptian Princess Fatima's entourage as a "White House military aide" when she visited the U.S. in the 1920s, and he had the audacity to personally present the princess to President Warren Harding. Harding was so impressed with Weinberg, and so chagrined that he'd overlooked the charming young officer on his "military staff," that he invited Weinberg to lunch.

Weinberg's most notable hoax, however, was his feat of convincing Queen Marie of Romania that he was her ambassador to the United States when she visited Washington.

Weinberg and DeMara were largely impostors for self-aggrandizement. Neither of them profited greatly from their shams.

Frank Abagnale's impersonations were covers for his activities as a check swindler, ploys to delude his victims or to impress beautiful women. He never deluded himself.

"I was always aware of who I was in reality," Abagnale says. "My postures were always for purposes of monetary gain. Still

As commercial pilot, Frank promoted himself to plane commander. Left, he lives it up in Dusseldorf. At bottom left he is shown handling air traffic while dead-heading. He is also shown here as a Pan Am pilot in the cockpit

money was just a part of it. It was a challenge to fool people, I had fun fooling them. It was exciting, and at times glamorous, and I became so good at what I was doing that it just came natural for me to assume an identity other than my own.

"But it was all just acting, and I was always aware that if and when I were caught, I wasn't going to win any Oscars. I was going to prison."

The guise Abagnale affected most often was that of airline pilot. "I have always felt that an airline pilot has one of the most challenging and glamorous jobs among the professions," Abagnale remarked.

He grinned. "A man once asked me why I never impersonated a Catholic priest, since he felt I would have been good in the pose. I told him the truth. No money and no women."

Abagnale is now happily married, but he admits candidly that in his bachelor days a lovely woman was more heady than champagne. "I never smoked, never used drugs, and very rarely drink—just a beer on occasion," said Abagnale. "Women were my only vice."

"That's why I favored the pose of airline pilot. It had the most beautiful women involved."

Frank Abagnale, a Bronxville, New York native, had youthful ambitions of becoming a real airline pilot. He was hardly a deprived youngster. His father owned a large and thriving stationery and office supply business in New York City, and Frank grew up with a generous allowance and a collegiate future assured.

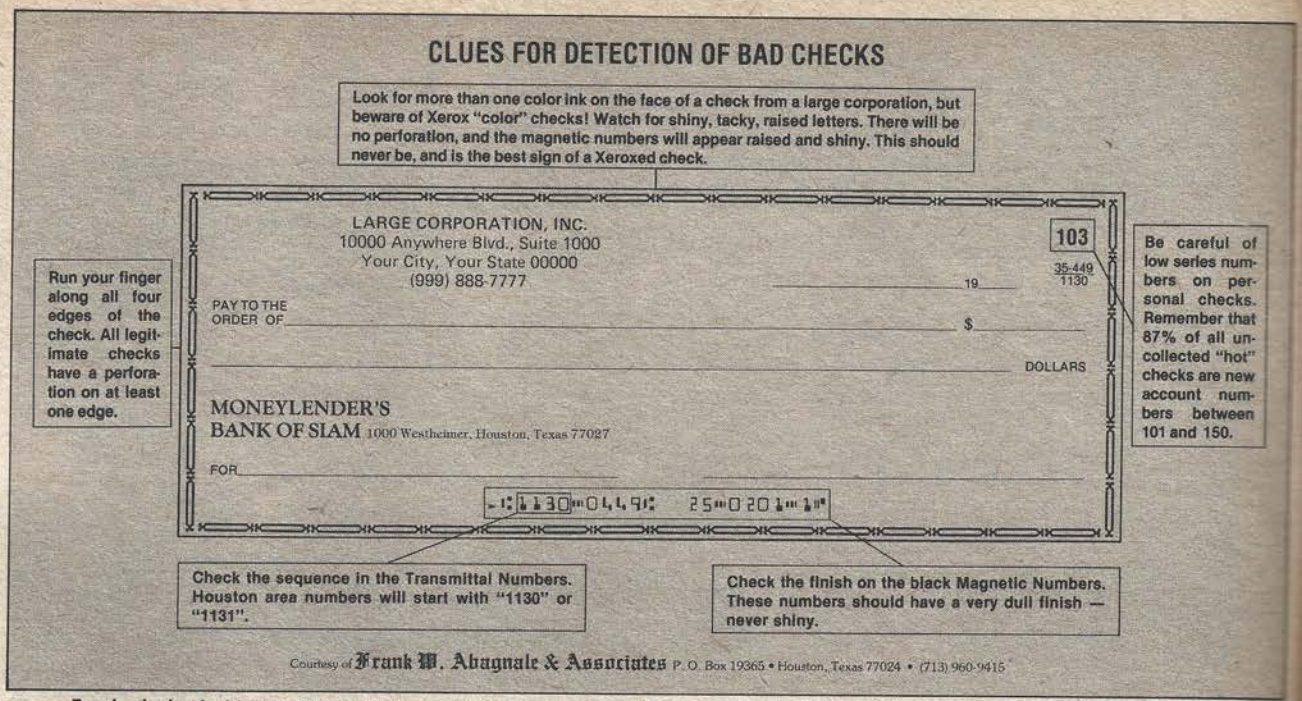
Abagnale turned himself out as a con man at 14, and his first mark was his father!

Abagnale really had no thought of defrauding his dad. He was merely exercising his powers of observation, playing—to a 14-year-old boy, anyway—an exciting and fascinating game that got out of hand and overwhelmed the kid.

It started innocently enough as a lesson in economic responsibility. Frank had an old car, one he'd bought himself from earnings from odd jobs and his allowance. But, at times, Abagnale wasn't able to use the car for days at a time because he hadn't the money for gas.

He approached his father and asked the elder Abagnale for one of his several gas company credit cards. "I'll be responsible, dad," Abagnale pleaded. "I'll pay the bill every month. I won't charge any gas unless I don't have money, and the first time I don't pay a bill, you can take the card back."

Frank left the meeting with his father's Mobil Oil credit card in


CLUES FOR DETECTION OF BAD CHECKS
Look for more than one color ink on the face of a check from a large corporation, but beware of Xerox "color" checks! Watch for shiny, tacky, raised letters. There will be no perforation, and the magnetic numbers will appear raised and shiny. This should never be, and is the best sign of a Xeroxed check.
LARGE CORPORATION, INC.
10000 Anywhere Blvd., Suite 1000
Your City, Your State 00000
(999) 888-7777
103
35-449
1130
PAY TO THE ORDER OF
19
$
DOLLARS
MONEYLENDER'S
BANK OF SIAM 1000 Westheimer, Houston, Texas 77027
FOR
Run your finger along all four edges of the check. All legitimate checks have a perforation on at least one edge.
Be careful of low series numbers on personal checks. Remember that 87% of all uncollected "hot" checks are new account numbers between 101 and 150.
Check the sequence in the Transmittal Numbers. Houston area numbers will start with "1130" or "1131".
Check the finish on the black Magnetic Numbers. These numbers should have a very dull finish — never shiny.
Courtesy of Frank W. Abagnale & Associates P.O. Box 19365 • Houston, Texas 77024 • (713) 960-9415

Frank devised this teaching aid to detect bad checks. Copies are now displayed in thousands of shopping marts

In his posh home in Texas, with his lovely wife listening attentively, "Professor" Agabnale explains how anyone can guard against hot checks

his pocket, and the arrangement worked nicely for several months. But one day a Mobil Oil representative called on the father at his office.

"Mr. Abagnale, we're not worried about your account, you've never been behind in a payment in ten years of doing business with us," said the man. "But we're curious.

"We'd like to know, Mr. Abagnale, how you run up a bill in excess of $5,000 in three months on just one car. You've charged enough tires, gasoline, batteries and other automotive items to operate a rather large fleet of cars!"

The senior Abagnale was astonished. There had to be a mistake, he said. "I don't even use my Mobil card, my son does," said the father.

The Mobil agent produced a file of receipts. The total bill was in excess of $5,000. All the receipts bore Frank's signature. Or, rather, his father's signature in Frank's handwriting.

The father was more puzzled than angry. "How'd he do it?" he asked. The agent shrugged. "We'd like to know, too."

The two men confronted the boy. Frank denied all the allegations at first. His father became persuasive. "Look, son, if you'll tell us how you did this, I'll forgive you—there'll be no punishment. And I'll pay the bills."

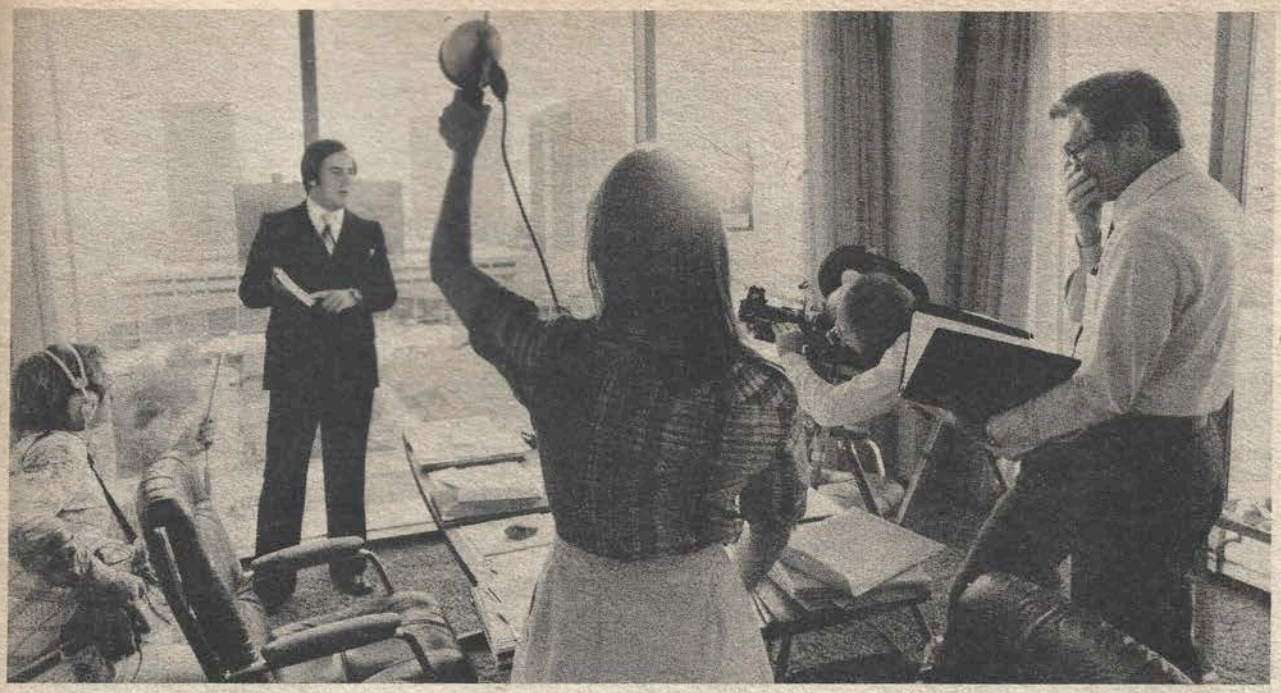
Frank promptly copped out. It was easy, he said, and strictly spur-of-the-moment. He was in this gas station, see, filling up his tank, and he intended to use the credit card since he was short of cash. Then his eye fell on the rack of new tires displayed in front of the station office and the sign that said the tires were on sale, four for $160.

Frank eyed the attendant. Was it true, he wondered, that there was alittle bit of larceny in every man? Frank engaged the man in a conversation, and explained he had a bad case of the shorts. The man sympathized. Business was lousy.

"Listen, I'll tell you what I'll do," Frank proposed. "I'll buy a set of those tires. I'll charge them on this card. Only I don't take the tires. You give me $100 instead. You've still got the tires and Mobil pays you $160. You're $60 ahead to start with, and when you do sell the tires, the whole $160 goes in your pocket. Okay?"

The attendant, who was also the owner of the station, examined the idea and liked it. He gave Abagnale $100.

"After that, it became a game," said Frank. "I set out to see how many stations would cooperate with me. I can't remember how many sets of tires, how many batteries, how much oil I bought. Sometimes, I'd just con the kid on the pumps into giving me $10, and sign a ticket for $20 worth of gas and oil.



Abagnale is shown here as star of mini-series on bad check passing being filmed by Langlois Communications

"I was generally home when the mailman came by. I always made sure I was there when the Mobil bill was due. I'd just rip it up and throw it away. Of course, I knew I'd get caught, that sooner or later, someone from Mobil would talk to dad. I wanted to tell him, but didn't have the nerve."

At 16, Abagnale's parents were divorced, and while he doesn't claim a broken home as the cause of his criminal career, it may have been a precipitating factor. He dropped out of school, left home and immersed himself in the lore of the streets. But street crime didn't interest him. Frank Abagnale is not a violent person. The idea of hurting an individual, physically or financially, was repugnant to him.

"That's why I never laid a piece of hot paper on a store clerk or an individual," said Abagnale. "Almost every department store clerk or grocery store checker has to make good—out of his salary, which probably isn't too much, anyway—any bad checks he or she accepts without the approval of the manager.

"I never wanted to get to the little guy. That's why I always hit a bank or a hotel before splurging on a new wardrobe."

Actually, Abagnale had no thoughts of becoming a fraud and a swindler when he decided, still in his 16th year, that he wanted to be an airline pilot and thereby become immediately and automatically desirable to all kinds of delectable chicks. There are undoubtedly other ages in a man's life when his reasoning powers are eclipsed by his libido, but none presses on the pre-frontal lobes like the post-puberty years, when the juices are running and every luscious lump of pulchritude that passes within view increases the flow.

Airline pilots had it over a 'possum in a persimmon tree. Abagnale had taken special note of airline pilots. Everyone he'd seen seemed to have more pretty foxes around than a Minnesota fur farm.

Frank decided against the years of study, training, work and other mundane trivialities that usually precede a man's winning a seat in a jetliner's cockpit. He didn't want to fly, just to flirt.

So he appointed himself a pilot, bypassing ground school, flight training and all that other jazz. Specifically, he appointed himself a Pan American World Airways pilot, much to that airline's ultimate dismay. In the five years he periodically "flew" for Pan Am—dutifully working up through the cockpit ranks from "flight engineer" to "first officer" to "captain" and aircraft commander—Abagnale bilked the company for a minor fortune in cash, traveled several hundred thousand miles at Pan Am's expense, and drove the firm's public affairs people up the walls.

"Considering what I did to them, the Pan Am people have been really good sports," Abagnale muses in recall. "I don't think there's any bad feelings on their part at all."

There certainly isn't on Abagnale's part.

Frank's first step in becoming a Pan Am pilot was simple. He merely sought out the manufacturer who made uniforms for Pan Am aircrewmen, convinced the man he was a newly-hired third officer (flight engineer) and had a spiffy rig cut to his measurements. At 16, Abagnale was as big as he'd ever be, and looked older than his years.

For weeks Abagnale paraded around in his uniform, content in his spurious role, but then he got to thinking he should have some portfolio to support his cover. So he went to a company that makes identification cards and had an ID card made, complete with the name "Frank Williams," a description, a fictitious social security number, and a color photograph. Frank then went to a hobby shop and bought a scale model of a Pan Am jetliner, the kind you put together yourself. Frank went home, took the miniature logos from the kit, threw the rest away, and affixed the logos to his new ID card, which he then sealed in plastic.

But every pilot carries a license, right? Right. Frank began poring over aviation magazines and periodicals and finally spotted what he was looking for—a plaque maker's ad offering any pilot's license engraved in sterling silver on an 8-by-10 hardwood base. All the pilot had to supply was the pertinent information from his FAA license. Abagnale, using an impressive list of bogus ratings, an FAA number he plucked from the air, and a valid check, sent for one of the plaques as Frank Williams.

Back came a beautiful, if enlarged, replica of an actual FAA airline pilot's

(Continued on page 51)

medical examiner testifies about rigor mortis, livor mortis, or algor mortis; the presence of antimony and barium in the swabs used in the NAA test; the absence of crystalline residue in the stomach of a suspected suicide (such as Marilyn Monroe), the sameness of a signature on a $50,000 check and the forged document employed to enter a bank safe deposit box to steal bonds belonging to the victim whom the defendant is accused of killing.

With professionals in the box, the justice system will be spared days, often weeks of wasted effort picking the bodies of "tried and true" jurors who, even after exasperating screening processes, still judge cases with all too much ignorance, incomprehension, and intolerance.

The duration of trials will be shortened spectacularly. There'll be no need for prosecutors or defense lawyers to object to hearsay testimony, to give juries five-hour briefings on medical terminology so they can understand a minute's testimony from a medical examiner that the lividity in the victim was fixed and irreversible.

Best of all, no prosecutor, no defense attorney, no witness no matter how expert, will be able to deceive the jury with evidence and testimony that isn't pure and true.

The experts in the jury box will know hokum when they hear and see it.

How does the court summon this professional jury for duty?

Our highly-computerized society can make it comparatively simple. Let's take a hypothetical case:

The vice president of a bank is charged with killing his wife with a belt of cyanide in her Bloody Mary; the motive was her $200,000 insurance policy and the love of a younger woman.

For the trial we'd need a pathologist on the jury (to understand the medical testimony and determine the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence pertaining to cyanide poisoning); an insurance man (who'll know his way around the clauses of the insurance policy and its application to the case); a homicide detective (to follow closely the steps and procedures of the investigators who rounded up the evidence against the defendant); perhaps a psychiatrist (to counter the contention of a defense alienist that the husband suffered mental disease or defect at the time of the crime); and any other experts the judge deems necessary in the jury box in order to render a just verdict.

Civil cases will also draw on this reservoir of cognizant jurors who will be less inclined than a gaggle of know-nothings to award an insurance company's million dollars for a stubbed toe suffered in a slip on the sidewalk.

Under this system, all the nation's eligible professional jurors would be catalogued in a colossal computer; install it in Washington, D.C., in Plains, Georgia, or anywhere.

Then when a case comes to trial in any U.S. courtroom—federal or state—the procedure followed will be uniformly the same from the first state to the fiftieth. The judge decides on the quota of jurors that will be needed to hear the evidence and testimony; he presses buttons in the courthouse for each category he desires for the box, and the panel is picked electronically—and impersonally.

The Government pays salaries for both federal and state jury duty, as well as expenses for travel and lodging.

Thirteen-week murder trials will be shortened to one-or-two-or-three-days' duration. Trials that might have taken a week under our present primitive system could be disposed of in a day or much less.

More than $17 billion was spent for criminal justice activities in the U.S. during 1975—the latest figures available—and the expectation is that 1976's outlay may approach $20 billion.

Local governments accounted for slightly more than 60 percent of the total 1975 spending; state criminal justice spending represented 27 percent, and the Federal government 13 percent.

The funds were lavished upon the law enforcement agencies, courts, legal services and prosecution, public defense, corrections, and other criminal justice activities. The statistics were assembled from the Federal government, the 50 states, the 334 counties throughout the United States with a population estimated as 50,000 or more.

Our population today is climbing toward 300 million, our crime rate is soaring and will soon be out of sight. Yet our justice system is wallowing abysmally in practices and procedures which were barely adequate in administering legal rectitude a far-gone century ago.

We have rocketed men to the moon and landed ingenious robots on Mars. We have conquered disease, advanced our lifespans, and developed technologically as no other nation on earth.

Yet we're still crawling in ox-carts in the pursuit of justice . . .

♦♦♦

Last of the Great Impostors

(Continued from page 47)

license. Frank had the plaqued license photocopied and reduced to wallet size, printed on the proper paper with his photo affixed, sealed in plastic and—Presto!—he was ready for flight duty, provided someone besides himself flew the plane.

Well, not quite. He had the air, the look, the uniform and the confidence of a real pilot, but damned little knowledge of the trade. He learned while eating lunch in a La Guardia Airport restaurant.

A TWA captain dropped into a chair at his table, nodded affably, and ordered a cup of coffee.

What kind of equipment are you on?" the TWA captain inquired casually.

Abagnale was totally ignorant of the fliers' lexicon. "Uh-uh, General Electric," he stammered in reply and beat a hasty exit, leaving the TWA pilot with an astonished look on his face.

Frank Abagnale, psychologists, psychiatrists and educators have since agreed, is a man who'd make a brilliant scholar. He has a mind as absorbent as a sponge and a photographic memory, capable of almost total recall. "His IQ of 136 is not really indicative of his intelligence," said one psychologist.

Abagnale commenced studying the operation of airlines, the personnel structure, and related matters, drawing his knowledge from both books and people. He is a man of immense warmth and charm and a personality that evokes an immediate friendly response. Will Rogers would have liked him.

Within a few weeks he'd picked up all the airline jargon, was familiar with all major airline routes, domestic and foreign, had an astonishing knowledge of the various commercial jets (a 707, for instance, has a fuel capacity of 26,000 gallons, which it burns at the rate of 2,000 gallons per hour), knew the instrument panels of a plane like the dashboard of his car, and learned a host of other things about the industry, including the fact that airline pilots could "dead-head" (ride free) anywhere in the world on any airline, and that hotels used by air crews billed the airlines direct for food, lodging and drink (on a monthly basis, yet) and would also cash checks issued by airline companies. Wowee, gang!

Abagnale couldn't resist. The challenge was too compelling. He managed a close look at a real Pan Am pilot's paycheck, faked one by dressing up a similar business check with Pan Am logos (from a model plane kit, naturally), and dead-headed to London, where he bilked the Royal Gardens Hotel for $452.16 in cash and a week's lodging, food and drinks for the dolls with whom Abagnale dallied. "I didn't drink myself," says Abagnale, dead-pan. "I couldn't. I was underage."

Later, as he enlarged on the game—and that's how he viewed it—Abagnale acquired an actual Pan Am payroll check and engaged an unwitting printer in Jersey to print up several thousand of the checks. Abagnale was cunning enough to keep abreast of Pan Am's business office procedures. When Pan Am went to a new check style, so did Abagnale.

Rome. Hong Kong. Honolulu. Paris. Sydney. Munich. Vienna. Stockholm. Cape Town. Tokyo. Cairo. Tel Aviv. Constantinople, er, Istanbul. L.A. Las Vegas. Frisco. Papeete. If a place caught Abagnale's fancy, he went there.

A non-revenue airline passenger is often seated in the cockpit jump-seat, especially if he's a pilot. Abagnale often rode in the cockpit jump-seat and not infrequently, as a professional courtesy, the aircraft commander would say, "Take over for me, Frank," and Abagnale would find himself in command of a DC-10, a 707, a 747 or some similar bird.

"There was never any danger to anyone," Abagnale says, laughing. "Technically, the co-pilot assumed command. I never once did any real flying, since ninety percent of the time the plane was on automatic pilot when the captain vacated his seat.

"If it wasn't on automatic pilot, I'd put it on AP and just rap with the co-pilot, picking his brains."

Abagnale was aware that he was a hunted man, but he was never certain of how closely he was being pursued or who was in the posse.

"I had never been arrested and mugged and printed, so I didn't know if I was a hunted man or not. I felt Frank Williams was."

Actually, Abagnale operated high, wide and handsome for four years before his shenanigans began to foul up computers and shake up the regular troops.

But when he got nervous, skittish or had any sort of misgivings, Abagnale would vacate whatever premises he occupied at the time (frequently leaving behind his clothes) and go to earth like a fox, usually in some city that was neither too big nor too small, but had all the comforts, fleshly and otherwise. Abagnale always had a roll big enough to provide for his creature needs.

One such place was Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the capital of the Pelican State. Abagnale was relaxing there during one of his self-imposed cooling periods under the name of Robert Conrad, erstwhile East Coast attorney looking for a less hectic place to practice law. His guise was complete, with a bogus degree from Harvard and a phony transcript from that Ivy League seat of learning.

While he was there a news story caught his eye. The State Attorney General was bemoaning his shortage of assistants. Experienced lawyers were spurning legal positions with the state because of low salaries, and young lawyers weren't too impressed with the pay scale, either. The Attorney General said he needed good men, and would accept applicants from any state who wanted to gain experience on a peanut wage scale.

Abagnale was intrigued, amused and—you guessed it—challenged. He strolled over to the Attorney General's office, presented his spurious credentials, and applied for one of the posts. The Attorney General was delighted. Of course, he pointed out, Abagnale, er, Conrad, would have to pass the state bar examination, but for a Harvard man, Napoleonic law would be a snap. He gave Frank a set of law books to study, and said Frank could take the examination any time he felt ready.

Abagnale took the examination a month later. He failed. "I knew I would, of course, but I needed to know the questions I'd be asked," he recalls.

Frank merely memorized the parts he'd missed and boned up on those. The third time he took the examination, he scored nearly perfect and was hired at $12,000 annually.

He was assigned to the civil section, handling trespass-to-try-title suits and land condemnation cases. Pretty soon, Frank had a case load of 60 or 70 cases, and a reputation as a sharp young lawyer. His first 30 cases were either settled out of court, in favor of the state, or won before a jury or a judge. Actually, Abagnale had superior courtroom manner and ability, and he picked up the patois of the area which, coupled with his name and his dark, Cajun-like looks, convinced most Louisianians he was a "good ol' boy" from the bayous.

Then a real Harvard law graduate appeared on the scene. Harvard men are like badgers. They like to stick together in their own burrows. A lone badger is going to find another badger. A Harvard man in a strange area is going to find another Harvard man. This one found Frank, and naturally every chance he got, he stuck Harvard into the conversation. Who were Frank's instructors? Who were the girls he knew? The families? What was his fraternity? What clubs? His pals?

"He warted me to death," sighs Frank. "Then he got suspicious and started checking up on me. I knew what he'd find, so I left."

Earlier this year, after a couple of news stories on Frank appeared in Houston newspapers, and after he'd appeared as a guest on several television shows, a prominent Houston lawyer called Frank Abagnale. The attorney was irritated.

"You know, I lost a case against you for a client over in LaFayette, a pretty big case," the barrister growled.

"Now I find out you weren't even a lawyer. By damn, I think I'm going to reopen that case, if at all possible."

"Well, that's up to you," replied Frank amiably. "However, you might give some thought to the publicity that will result and the effects on your image. I mean, a big lawyer like you, beaten in court by a high school dropout and con man." Abagnale left the implications hanging.

There was a pause at the other end of the wire. "I see what you mean," the lawyer said quietly. "Forget it."

Abagnale returned to his bogus role of pilot, jaunting around the world's fun spots and practicing his profession as paperhanger. By now Abagnale was one of the most polished check swindlers operating on any continent. Through study, observation, daring and attention to detail, most of which knowledge was gleaned from legitimate sources, Abagnale knew as much about check transactions as any banker or businessmen.

The most successful check swindlers, says Abagnale, have three factors in their favor . . .

The first is personality, which in Frank's book includes personal grooming. The best con men are well dressed and exude an air of confidence and authority. They are usually as charming, courteous and attractive as a politician seeking reelection, although they can affect the arrogance of a tycoon.

The second is observation. The best con men pick up on details and items the average man overlooks. They read "sign" like an Indian. They have radar eyes. Frank Abagnale would have made the best Pawnee scout on the frontier look like a half-blind bumbler.

The third factor is research, a big difference between the hard-nose criminal and the super con man. A man planning a bank holdup might case the bank for rudimentary facts, but in the end he depends on his gun. The con man fixing to hit the same bank with a fictitious or counterfeit check or a sophisticated swindle researches the caper. His brain is his only weapon. He learns something about the key people in the bank, their habits, movements and thinking. And before he makes his move, he knows the operating procedures of the bank.

Any one of the three can be the key to a successful check swindle.

"It's not how good the check looks, for instance, but how good the man looks," Abagnale points out. "Some of my checks have been the sloppiest looking things you ever saw. Sometimes they weren't even checks.

"Once, in Sweden, I ran out of phony checks. I hadn't intended to stay there very long, and took only a few with me. But I had a cash receipts book with me—I forget why. I probably found it somewhere or picked it up somewhere.

"Anyway, I papered the Stockholm banks with the things, hitting the banks that didn't have foreign exchange departments, so their people weren't apt to know what a real American check looked like, anyway. I'd just fill one out, present it with my passport, visa and International Driver's License (issued by most European countries) and I'd get the cash every time."

Sometimes the scantest combination of the three would pay off like a slot machine on three bars.

Take a nice suburban bank. New building. Expansion motto on its literature. Huge, roomy lobby. Tellers on one side. Junior officers scattered across the opposite wall. Senior officers in airy, glassed-in offices. President on the third floor. Jasper P. Cashman, cool, distant, crusty, and proud of his bank. Started as a teller when the bank had $7,000,000 assets. President now, and assets of over $100,000,000. Jasper P. Cashman doesn't like to be bothered by the underlings con-

cerning rather trivial matters.

Frank Abagnale picks up on things like that. And he calls Jasper P. Cashman's office until he gets the right answer.

"I'm sorry, sir, Mr. Cashman is out of town and won't be back until Monday."

Just before lunch, Abagnale saunters into the bank. Business suit, very expensive. Bali custom-mades, lustre shined. Hair styled. Countess Mara tie. Leather brief case, slim and elegant.

He knows the man he wants immediately. The new young account officer. Desk neat and tidy. Name-plate gleaming. The shine of his promotion still on his face.

Abagnale drops into the chair in front of the desk, places the briefcase on the desk.

"Can I help you, sir?"

"Yes, you can, as a matter of fact. I'm Robert Leeman from Junction, and I need to cash a check, a rather large one. I've all the proper identification and you can call my bank for verification, but I don't think that will be necessary. J. P. Cashman knows me, and he'll verify the check. You can call him. Here, I'll do it myself, I need to talk to him anyway."

Frank picks up the 'elephone and punches the right extension numbers.

"Yes, Mr. Cashman please . . . He isn't . . . Oh, yes, he mentioned that last week and it slipped my mind. Well, tell him Bob Leeman dropped by, and tell him Jean and I are looking forward to seeing him and Mildred in Junction on the twelfth. Yes, thank you."

Abagnale hangs up and shakes his head. Grins ruefully. "Doesn't look like my day. I needed the cash, too. Can't wait to have it wired here."

"Uh, how big is the check, sir?"

"I want $7,500. Do you think you can take care of it? I can give you the number of my bank in Junction."

Frank briskly writes out a check for $7,500, payable to the bank. Hands it to the young account officer.

"Well, sir, I'll have to have Mr. James, the vice-president, okay this, but I'll let you know in a minute."

The young executive doesn't call Abagnale's bank. He walks into James' office, and he says exactly what Abagnale has conditioned him to say. "Sir, there's a Mr. Leeman here from Junction and he needs to cash this rather large check. He's a personal friend of Mr. Cashman. He wanted to see Mr. Cashman, but Mr. Cashman's out of town."

"A personal friend of the old man?"

"Yes, sir. Business and social."

"Cash it. We sure as hell don't want to irritate any of the old man's buddies."

Two minutes later, the young account officer is handing the bogus check to a teller. "Cash this for the gentleman. Mr. Leeman, I'm glad I could help you."

Abagnale was pleased, too.

"Now, had he called the bank in Junction, and asked for the bookkeeping department and verification of the account, he would have learned that Robert Leeman had an account there of $20,000, more than enough to cover the check.

"I opened the account in Junction the day before with a cashier's check on a Chicago bank for $20,000. Of course, that check was phony, too. When I opened the account, I was told not to write any checks until the cashier's check was cleared.

"But the people in bookkeeping wouldn't know that. All they'd do would be to look up the name and account number and see a balance of $20,000."

Abagnale had a veritable barrel-full of such tricks, especially if a bank left itself open to a little light larceny. He changed the business practices of a lot of banks.

There used to be banks that would certify personal checks. Every time he came across one, Abagnale would open up a legitimate account of $200-$1,000. Under an assumed name, naturally. Then he'd go shopping for a car, some real neat wheels. Loaded. He was the kind of customer car salesmen loved to do business with. No real haggling.

"You want $4,796.28 for this car? Make it an even $4,700 and I'll take it. Can you get it ready this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir. Anytime after three p.m."

"Okay, have it ready at five p.m., and I'll bring you a certified check."

Frank would go back to his bank and write out a check, payable to the automobile dealer. In the space behind the dollar sign, he'd put in the numerals thusly: $47—— . In the space in front of DOLLARS, he'd write: "Forty-Seven ——— ."

Then he'd take the check to a teller. "Would you certify this, please." The teller would glance at the check, call bookkeeping and verify Abagnale's account under whatever name he was using. Then she'd certify the check on the back.

Once out of the bank, Frank, using the same pen he'd used to write the check, would fill in two zeroes in back of the $47 figure, and write in "hundred" after the "Forty-seven."

"It didn't work every time," said Abagnale. "You had to be careful with the dashes you used. Too close to the numbers and writing, and the amount looked cramped. Too far, and the teller might close up the gaps herself. If she did, I didn't go back to the dealer."

But most of the time, Abagnale left town in a new car. Well, you don't expect a man who flies free to pay for ground transportation, do you?

Abagnale always sold the car before they got too hot, or abandoned them.

Almost any gesture, no matter how casual, fired Abagnale's imagination. Once, in a Midwest bank, opening one of his usual $200 "front" accounts, Abagnale noticed the stream of people next to him filling out deposit slips for payroll checks, cash or credit card slips. The depositors were using the blank forms provided by the bank at the center counter in the lobby. Abagnale noticed that only one out of ten, if that many, were using the blank space provided for the depositor's account number.

Abagnale knew exactly the procedure that would ensue. The deposit slips would go from the teller to the bookkeeping department, where those without account numbers would be filled in by fiscal clerks. The whole batch would then be fed into computers, which would automatically credit the account by number.

Abagnale mused on the situation, grinned, and stuck a sheaf of the deposit slips in his pocket. He went back to his pad, and meticulously filled in each account number blank with his own, then returned to the bank and slipped the deposit slips back in a slot.

Three days later, he walked into the bank to make another deposit and casually inquired, "By the way, what is my balance? I forgot to enter some checks I've written this week."

The teller obligingly called bookkeeping. "Your balance, not counting this deposit, is $42,876.45, Mr. Adams."

An hour later, Abagnale withdrew $40,000 and headed for the Bahamas. "You can't use that trick anymore, if you're a paperhanger," said Frank.

"After a couple more scores like that, banks went to magnetic ink, a restricted ink, which isn't available to just anyone. Oh, forgers could get it, I was able to get some, but most of them wouldn't use it if they could get it."

Why? Okay, it's lesson time for all you merchants and bankers who regularly accept payroll, personal, cashier's or company checks. Pay attention, for this lesson could be a helluva lot cheaper than the one you'll get from a passing paperhanger. Bad checks are easy to spot once you know what to look for.

First, all legitimate checks will have at least one perforated edge—at the top, if it's torn out of a personal check book, at one end if it's taken from a business sheaf, on three sides if taken from a business check ledger. Some savvy firms even perforate all four sides of their checks.

The only perfectly smooth-edged checks you're likely to encounter are those issued by the U.S. Treasury, and the only check swindlers who mess with Uncle Sugar are the same kind of stupos who counterfeit currency. Very rarely does one elude capture.

Paperhangers, of course, do deal in personal checks. Like the company checks, cashier's checks and department store refund checks, they're all counterfeit. Most of them are manufactured by the forger himself. Abagnale, for instance, when he wanted to make up a batch of fictitious firm checks (or duplicate a legitimate company's checks) would buy a large paste-up board from an art store, a gross of press-on letters, any necessary logos, and retire to his hotel room where he'd create a huge check

Then, using an I-Tek camera, he'd photograph the check, reducing it 100 times and thus taking away any infractions and discrepancies. The infractions and discrepancies (in lines, lettering, etc.) might be there, but the naked eye wouldn't be able to detect them. Then he'd get them printed up in sheets.

"And, of course, when they were separated into individual checks, usually using a simple paper-cutting machine, they were smooth on all four sides," said Abagnale. "A forger could buy a perforating machine, if he wants to lay out $30,000 to $40,000, but I don't know of one who ever did. They can be traced too easily, and they're not something you can lug around in a suitcase."

But assume some bogus checks do have one perforated edge, and some do. Check forgers often open legitimate accounts under phony names to get a pack or two of real personalized checks.

But those are amateurs, in the same category as the essentially-honest but financially-inept man or woman who has a lot of "insufficient funds" checks floating around. More on them later.

Your real check swindler with a bundle of bogus checks is a different breed of cat. There is a subtle way to detect his wares. Real checks, remember, are printed these days using magnetic ink, the dullest, flattest ink around. Restricted, remember?

Okay, a man hands you a check and you aren't sure. Merely take one edge in your left fingers and the other edge in your right fingers and tilt the check back and forth. If any light reflects off any of the letters or numbers, call the cops.

Another test for a hot check is perhaps the surest. You don't know about the light test. The man looks good. The check looks good. The name, address, telephone number and city matches up with all his identification. He's even got a credit card from your store.

Take a close look at the numbers down in the lower left hand corner. We'll use one of my personal checks as an example. No forger could possibly benefit, since even my banker hesitates to cash one. The numbers on this check are "1130—0119 . . . . . 546 085." Okay. The 11 means this check is printed within the 11th Federal Reserve District, with offices in Dallas. There are 12 and ONLY 12 Federal Reserve Districts in the United States. The 11th includes Texas. The "3" after the 11 stands for the 3rd District Office in Houston. The 0 means that immediate credit is available on the check (in my case it generally is credit).

In the second set of numbers, the 0 stands for the clearing house (Houston) and the 119 is the bank identification number. The 546 085 is my account number. I won't identify my bank, because both of us are ashamed of my account.

"Now, I am going to hit the Houston area with a bunch of bad checks, personal and payroll," says Abagnale. "All of them purport to be Houston checks. But the numbers in the lower left hand corner will start with the series '1230' or '0130.' Why? Because I need time to operate, and how many people even look at the numbers in the lower left hand corner?

"But a computer does. And when one of my checks hits the clearing house bank—and it will be there the same night I cash it—the computer will kick it out. In the case of the '1230' number, it will be sorted into a batch of checks going to the 12th District in Los Angeles for collection. In the case of the '0130' number, it will go into u batch destined for the First District, which takes in Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts. Now, in either case, it will take two or three days for the check to get to the particular district, and it won't be rejected until the computer on the other end starts sorting by bank numbers. At that point, some clerk will look at it, see that it purportedly represents a Houston bank, and hand-mail it back. In most cases he or she won't notice the numbers in the lower left hand corner, either. It'll just be considered a computer error. In any event, five to seven days have passed before the Houston victim is aware he's been taken, and I'm long gone."

Now, for the other kind of bad check, the "insufficient funds" check written on a legitimate account. The check writer isn't really out to swindle, but the merchant gets burned just as badly. Okay, you're thinking about accepting a personal check you feel is legitimate. After all, the guy lives in the townhouses across the way and shops with you regularly.

Look at that big, bold number in the upper right hand corner. The lower that number is, the bigger the odds the check is insufficient. Most banks today don't issue a series of personal checks starting below 100. Any check numbered below 200 is almost certain to be on an account less than a year old. A number above 600 or 1000 indicates the account has been active for years.

If in doubt, pick up a telephone and call the bank's bookkeeping department and verify the check.

"At least 97 percent of checks returned because of insufficient funds are under the number 200, and there are $11,000,000 in insufficient funds checks floating around at any one time," said Abagnale.

"Now, there are swindlers who'll try to work a bank for actual checks with high numbers. They'll open a legitimate account, and within a week or so they'll get a book of checks numbered 101, say, through 200. They'll wait a f w weeks and then re-order checks, and ask that the new set of checks start with the number 500, maybe even 800. Now, the smart bank clerk, when he gets such a request, audits that account. If the last check to clear is number 117, for instance, he knows a con is in the making."

Asking for identification on a check, says Abagnale, is merely a placebo in most instances. A driver's license is really useless, since it can be as phony as the check. Major credit cards are apt to be stolen, and if they are legitimate and the check is insufficient, such firms cannot now legally give you any information useful in tracing the person who cashed the check.

"A major oil company credit card is the best ID to ask for," says Frank. "Their files will reflect his car license number and his current address, as up-to-date as the time and place he bought his last tank of gas."

Abagnale notes that a new system of inkless fingerprinting required by some banks and businesses isn't likely to work. "For one thing, one or even three or four fingerprints aren't enough to make a man on his prints," said Abagnale. "To connect a man to fingerprints, he's got to have been printed somewhere and his prints be on file with the FBI, and you need all ten fingers for a computer search."

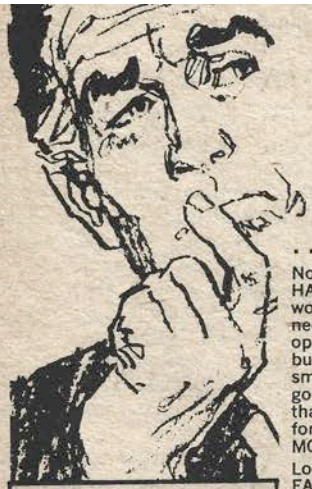
"For another, most paperhangers will be glad to give you a print. When I knew I was going to be asked for a print, I simply dusted my fingers with moca powder before passing a check, and three minutes afterwards, the print I'd left disappeared. Or I'd paint my fingertips with airplane glue. Any print I made then was useless."

Before he learned such things, however, Abagnale did a lot of worrying. For instance, he felt he'd left too many clues behind when he passed a series of checks in California, all written on a Eureka bank. By then, Frank had equipped himself with all sorts of sham credentials, including degrees from various colleges, birth certificates, military discharges, and so forth.

If he didn't have it, he knew where to get it. In this case he had it, a phony FBI badge and a bogus FBI identification folder. Abagnale went to the bank, identified himself as a federal agent to the president, interviewed the man in a businesslike manner, and walked out with all the original copies of the checks in his pocket. "He had microfilm copies, but they wouldn't stand up in court, I knew," Abagnale grinned.

Sometimes his boldness surprised even himself, but observing inventiveness demands daring, and Abagnale's escapades were 95 percent spur-of-the-moment capers.

Like the time he was lamming Boston. He'd gone there one week and bought a legitimate $12,000 cashier's check. Then he'd bought all the necessary stuff (paper stock, etc.) to duplicate a dozen counterfeits. "There were all as smooth-edged as a carpenter's rule, and any alert teller could have detected them as phony, but I passed them all, saving the legitimate one for last. Several did call the issuing bank to verify the check had been issued and was unredeemed." Frank pulled the operation several times in



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several different U.S. cities.

Anyway, he's leaving Boston. Dressed in his Pan Am pilot's uniform, he's at Boston International Airport (anyway, the airport in Boston) and smoothly wrangling a deadhead flight to Paris on a foreign carrier. "I'm sorry, Captain Williams," the airline clerk in charge told him. "But we don't have any flights out tonight. There's a new noise abatement ordinance in effect here, and there are no jet flights between midnight and dawn. We can accommodate you tomorrow afternoon, or day after tomorrow morning. So far, we have ample space on both flights."

"I'll let you know," said Abagnale, and walked away.

It was a few minutes after midnight when Abagnale left the terminal, and he noticed that all the shops, restaurants, boutiques, travel agencies, etc., were closing up. He noticed something else, too. Most of the business people were dropping their day's receipts into the night depository of a Boston bank that had a branch office at the airport. The depository was the usual kind, a heavy steel structure with a spring trap door built into the wall of a corridor leaing out of the terminal.

The next night, about 11:45 p.m., Abagnale was back at the terminal. This time he was dressed in a snappy blue guard's uniform, a heavy pistol on his belt and a shoulder patch proclaiming he was a security guard for the bank. He had with him a rubber-wheeled dolly, suspended from a metal band of the top of which was a huge U.S. Mail-type bag, but bearing the name of the bank in large black letters.

Abagnale also had a sign which he taped over the depository's spring trap door. The sign read:

NIGHT DEPOSIT BOX
OUT OF ORDER
PLEASE MAKE DEPOSITS
WITH SECURITY GUARD

"You know, not a depositor questioned that sign, made any comment to me except good evening or good night, or seemed the least bit concerned," Abagnale recalls.

Around 1:00 a.m., after the last depositor had made his contribution, Abagnale took his haul back to his motel room and sorted it out. He netted $62,000 in cash.

Frank Abagnale has style and class. Before catching the morning flight to Paris, he called the bank and told them where to find the $1,000,000-plus in non-cash items.

After a suitable sojourn in Europe, Abagnale returned to the United States and holed up in Atlanta, Georgia, leasing a swank apartment in a "swinging singles" complex. Abagnale posed as "Dr. Frank Adams" and when the apartment manager asked his specialty, he told her he was a pediatrician.

"I thought that was the safest kind of doctor to be in a singles complex. I didn't want to be making any house calls," Abagnale quipped.

To those who asked, Abagnale explained his practice was in New York but he had decided to take a year's leave of absence. However, one of those who got around to asking was an actual doctor-resident, the chief of pediatrics in a Marietta (a suburb of Atlanta) hospital. The doctor was delighted that another physician lived in the complex, and insisted on bringing Abagnale into his social circle.

"I had to go out and get some medical books and stay up late at night studying, just to carry on a conversation with him," Abagnale recalls.

One evening, to Abagnale's surprise, his friend asked him to join the staff of the Marietta hospital as a consultant. "I don't have a license to practice in Georgia," said Abagnale.

"You won't need one, since you'll only be a consultant," said the friend. He eventually beat down Abagnale's protests, and Abagnale went to work on the doctor's staff at a salary of $22,000 annually.

"I was a consultant, all right," Abagnale recalls. "Anytime anything came up concerning a patient, I'd consult one of the staff interns. They loved me, because I

was the only one who let them get practical experience."

However, Abagnale was nervous in the job. There was always the possibility he'd be confronted with a life or death situation, and to date he'd managed to avoid hurting any individual, physically or financially. He didn't want to mar his record. One day, the resident supervisor of the night staff told Abagnale he had to go to California because of a death in the family, and Abagnale had been tapped as his temporary replacement.

When Abagnale took the post at the hospital, he'd presented a phony medical degree from Stanford University. "I'm going to visit the medical school while I'm out there," said the supervisor. "I'm going to tell your old professors how well you're doing here."

The resident supervisor flew off to California. Frank donned his Pan Am pilot's uniform and flew off to Lima, Peru, then to Europe. It was during this trip that Frank realized that those who seemed suspicious of his pilot's status didn't question his capabilities or ratings, they seemed most puzzled by the fact that he was always alone. Most aircraft commanders were generally accompanied by a crew. Too, they usually had a jet liner parked at the airport.

Abagnale had no ambitions to acquire a 747, but he did hit upon a plan to acquire a crew. He simply wrote a letter to the University of Arizona on Pan Am stationery, identified himself as an airline recruiter, and said he'd like to visit the campus on a recruiting program. UA officials welcomed him warmly, and Abagnale interviewed some 35 lovely coeds.

Abagnale told the prospective "employes" he needed eight girls for a four-month tour of Europe, during which they would assist him in a promotional and advertising program on the airline's behalf. "We would prefer to use actual stewardesses, but this is our busy season and we can't pull eight girls off the flight schedule," Abagnale stated.

"However, you will dress as stewardesses, assume the role of stewardesses, and draw the pay of stewardesses. And I promise you, I'll see that each of you are brought to the attention of our top people, should you decide to apply for our regular stewardess program."

Most of the girls were more than agreeable. Abagnale selected the eight he deemed the most gullible, decked them out in custom-tailored stewardess ensembles and commenced a delightful tour of Europe. Amazingly, the operation went off without a hitch. Each payday, Abagnale would produce a Pan Am payroll check for each girl, have her endorse it and cash it for her at the particular hotel cashier's cage. When some of the girls expressed a desire to mail her check back home for deposit, Abagnale explained they were being paid from "foreign funds" and the checks had to be cashed in Europe. "Go buy a money order and mail it home," he'd say.

Wherever Abagnale and his crew visited, Abagnale would hire a local photographer and have him take pictures of the girls in scenic settings or "promotional poses." Frank would pay the photographers himself for local work, and instructed them to send their prints and negatives to the Pan Am public relations office in New York for additional payments.

Abagnale learned later that Pan Am's PR people were flabbergasted when the "promotional" photos began to flood the office from all over Europe. "They were running around, screaming, 'Who are these girls? Who the hell ordered all these pictures?' "

The unwitting stewardesses never knew they were part of a con until long after they were back in Arizona and back in school.

Abagnale, under the impression that he was "hot" again, dropped out of sight in Provo, Utah, where he assumed the identity of Frank Masterson, a sociology instructor on a sabbatical from an Eastern college. He even had a counterfeit degree from Columbia as credentials, should anyone ask.

Someone did ask. She was his companion of the moment, a vivacious language instructor at Brigham Young University. The woman said the college had an opening for a sociology instructor, and it would be nice if Frank taught there, too. Abagnale applied for the post and was hired at $15,000 annually. "I taught two semesters," Abagnale said. "It was the easiest con I ever pulled. All I had to do was read a chapter ahead of my students. I left because there was no real challenge."

Frank Abagnale's fantastic run of luck was fading, however. He was no longer a fantasy to the FBI, Interpol, and scores of other police bodies. After nearly six years of being the victorious fox, Abagnale was about to be confronted by the hounds.

An Air France stewardess spotted him in Montpelier in early 1970, and put the arm on him. A squad of Interpol agents and gendarmes moved in and collared him. He was tried and convicted of fraudulent check swindles and sentenced to an indeterminate term. Abagnale shudders when he recalls the six months he spent in a French prison.

"It was a hell hole," he says. "There was no bed. I slept on the floor. I had no wash basin and no toilet. You washed out of a bucket and did your business in a bucket. At night they'd push a mattress into the cell, and at five a.m. wake you up and make you push it back out. I did my time in winter. I almost froze to death, since the cell wasn't heated. I had bread and coffee for breakfast, bread and soup for lunch and bread and coffee for dinner. I went in weighing 195 pounds. I came out weighing 120 pounds."

Abagnale didn't walk out a free man. Swedish police were waiting to whisk him to Stockholm. The Swedish cops were women, two fantastic bits of fuzz. Frank was handcuffed when the gendarmes handed him over. "Take the handcuffs off, please," said the one gorgeous gumshoe. "We don't believe in them."

Frank turned on the charm. The Swedish cops smiled sweetly and discreetly allowed Frank a peek at their pieces, the Scandinavian equivalent of .357s. "We are both expert shots," said the one. "Do not try to get away. We would be sorry to shoot you, but we would."

Abagnale knows women. He believed them. In Sweden, Abagnale was astonished to find himself "imprisoned" on a college campus, under minimum supervision, while awaiting trial. "The Swedish people are the most humane I've ever encountered," Frank recalls.

When Abagnale was brought to trial, all the charges against him were dismissed. "All the complaints alleged I had cashed fraudulent checks," Frank said. "My lawyer merely produced all the evidence, and pointed out they were not checks at all, but ordinary business receipts."

The Swedes elected to deport Frank to the United States. They put him aboard a New York flight and notified the FBI of the flight and arrival time. FBI agents were on the ramp when the plane door was opened, but Frank was no longer aboard.

"He was here just ten minutes ago," protested an astonished stewardess. And he had been. "Just before we landed, I went into the restroom and dismantled the toilet," said Frank. "I dropped down into the baggage comparment and when the plane stopped to make its turn to taxi to the terminal, I opened an emergency door, dropped to the runway, slammed the door and took off across the field."

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police next nabbed Frank, on December 14, 1970, in Montreal. He was handed over to the FBI, who lodged him in the Fulton County, Georgia, jail in Atlanta to await trial on some strong cases the feds had on Abagnale there. The Fulton County jail was almost as bad as the French jug. "It's bad news, man," another prisoner told Frank. "The only decent place in the joint is the hospital."

The only decent facility in the cellblock was a pay telephone. Frank plopped in a dime and dialed the desk sergeant.

"This is Dr. John Petsky," said Frank in authoritative tones. "You have a patient of mine as a prisoner, Frank Abagnale. Mr. Abagnale is a severe diabetic, subject to frequent comas, and I would appreciate it, sergeant, if you could confine him in the hospital where I could administer proper treatment."

Within 30 minutes, Frank was ensconced in the hospital ward, where he stayed until a U.S. marshal took him to the federal detention center in Atlanta to await trial.

And it was from the federal prison that Abagnale perpetrated one of the most bizarre and hilarious escapes in the annals of prison history. It wasn't so much an escape, in fact, as it was a cooperative eviction.

The "particular point in time" and the circumstances of Abagnale's arrival combined to set up the comedic caper. U.S. prisons were being raked over by civil rights groups and scrutinized by Congressional committees and Justice Department agents. Prison inspectors were working overtime, and earning the enmity of prison administrators.

The U.S. marshal who delivered Frank to the center had no commitment papers and a short temper when questioned by prison officials. "He's here under a court order. Just put him a cell and feed him until we come after him," the marshal snapped.

"Another damned prison inspector, eh?" murmured the guard who took Frank to his cell. Frank demurred. "Not me, pal, I'm doing time."

The guard snorted. "Bull! You bastards think you're so slick. You people got two of our guys fired last year. We've learned how to spot you."

After a week of deriding treatment—but posh lodging, food and entertainment—Frank realized the prison personnel thought he really was a prison inspector. He contacted a still-loyal girlfriend in Atlanta.

"Look, I know what it usually takes to get out of a place like this," Abagnale told her on the telephone, which prisoners were allowed to use in privacy once weekly.

"See what you have to do to get in, will you?"

The girl didn't have to do much. She merely identified herself as Abagnale's fiance, which he verified, and she was allowed to visit him. She was chic, sophisticated and lovely, and her visits only bolstered the guards' belief that Abagnale was a Bureau of Prisons fink. They were allowed to converse privately.

On her second visit, Frank had formulated his plan. It was more of an intellectual exercise, really, for he didn't think it would succeed. "I want you to go to the Bureau of Prisons office, and see a prison inspector," Frank instructed her. "I don't care how you do it, but get one of his cards. Also, an FBI agent interviewed me here while I was in jail. Here's his card. His name is Erin Kelly.

"Now, if you can get the prison inspector's card, here's what you do. There's a little printing shop in Atlanta, run by a friend of mine. Take the cards to him. Have him print up duplicate prison inspector's cards, but with the name Frank Abagnale on it. Then have him duplicate Kelly's personal card, but substitute your telephone number for the bureau's. If you're successful, I'll tell you what to do next on your visit next week."

The girl was successful. On her next

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visit, she slipped Frank the two counterfeit calling cards. He scanned them and grinned. "Okay, we try it tomorrow night. You be at home all evening. Around nine p.m., put on a tape for background, one with peoples' voices in the background, like a busy office. This is what you say . . ."

The following night, shortly before 9:00 p.m., Abagnale hailed the cellblock guard, who was by now a friendly adversary.

"Listen, Ron, something's come up, and I need to see the sergeant on duty. You were right about me, I'm a prison inspector. Here's my card." Frank handed the guard the bogus card. The guard looked at it and grinned. "By damn, I knew I was right about you," the guard chortled. He did not think to ask how Frank suddenly was in possession of personal cards.

The guard took Abagnale to the desk sergeant, who was equally pleased to learn, Abagnale was, as he too suspected, a prison inspector. "We had you figured all along," the guard sergeant said.

Abagnale nodded. "Well, it would have all been out in the open tomorrow, anyway. And I can tell you guys you got nothing to worry about. You run a clean, tight ship, the kind the bureau likes to brag about.

"But right now I've got some urgent business. I need to get hold of this FBI agent. Get him on the horn for me, will you?" Abagnale handed over Kelly's doctored card. The guard sergeant dialed the number.

A girl's voice answered crisply. "Frederal Bureau of Investigation, may I help you?"

"Yes, Agent Erin Kelly, please, there's a man here wants to talk to him," said the sergeant, and handed the receiver to Frank. Abagnale waited an appropriate few seconds, then said: "Agent Kelly? My name is Frank Abagnale, Bureau of Prisons inspector. My authorized code number is 16295-A . . . yes, that's right . . . I'm here now, but these people know who I am now.

"Listen, Erin, you know the guy we talked about in Philly? Well, I need to get with you tonight on him. I just remembered something we should have thought of then.

"No, I can't talk to you about it on the telephone. There's too many top people, yours and mine, who'd get uptight. And it can't wait until morning. There's a U.S. marshal going to spring me in the morning. Can you come over here? It won't take ten minutes. No, no, these guys won't blow your cover . . . wait a minute, lemme see if the sergeant will help us . . ."

Frank covered the receiver with his hand, and grinned at the sergeant. "Boy, these J. Edgar Hoovers are really cautious. He's working undercover and doesn't want anyone to see him . . . If he parks out front, can I just go out there and get in his car for a few minutes? I need to get this info to the cat . . . but he's really freaky about this thing . . . Hey, thanks, sergeant . . ."

Abagnale went back to the telephone. "Okay, Erin, come on over. It shouldn't take you over ten minutes to get here. Park at the curb between the gun towers. What're you driving? White over red Buick? Fine . . . no, no problems . . . These guys know the score."

In about 12 minutes, a red-over-white Buick pulled to the curb in front of the prison entrance. Frank and the guard sergeant were standing inside the door. The driver had a large-brimmed hat pulled down over his features, a dark scarf wrapped around his neck. The sergeant snickered. "Man, Agent 007 himself." He unlocked the barred entrance door. Frank walked down to the car, and the driver leaned over and opened the window on the passenger side. Frank leaned in and grinned at his girlfriend, dressed in men's clothing. "Wait a couple of minutes and then we'll see how fast you can get this thing going," he said.

After three or four minutes, Frank turned and looked at the sergeant, standing 40 feet away on the top step.

"Hey, sergeant, I need to be gone for about five minutes. No problems and no sweat, okay?" Without waiting for an answer, Frank stepped into the car and the Buick burned rubber leaving.

It was an hour before the sergeant and the other guards on duty began to suspect they'd been had. It is a matter of record in Erin Kelly's files that the guards attempted to cover the fact that they'd been conned by reporting Abagnale had escaped forcibly. The truth, however, outed, as they say.

Abagnale was one of the most hunted fugitives in America the first quarter of 1971. Kelly himself led the hunt, miffed at the many times Abagnale had thwarted him.

Kelly is an outstanding agent. A brilliant officer, really. He tracked Frank to a motel outside Atlanta, and in February, agents and local police moved in. Frank spotted the vanguard of local officers as they came onto the motel parking lot, however. He felt certain he was trapped, but he was also challenged to make a run for it. He slipped on his suit coat and stepped out the back door, expecting to run into some officers. To his surprise, there were none, but as he walked toward the side of his cabin, two deputies rounded the corner. "Hey, you, hold it!" shouted one leveling his pistol. Frank affected a cool mien and did not "hold it." He stepped toward the deputies.

"Davis, FBI," he said crisply. "Is Kelly here yet?"

The deputies lowered their guns. "He should be around front by now," the officer said. "Okay, cover this area," said Abagnale. "One of you get on the back door." Abagnale walked on into the darkness and freedom again.

But on March 30, 1971, as he strolled down one of New York's better streets, he was suddenly flanked by two genial but hard-eyed men. One displayed the credentials of a detective sergeant, New York City Police. "Gotcha, Frank" the sergeant said firmly.

Abagnale's day of reckoning came soon after. He was returned to Atlanta for trial. He had so many counts against him and was wanted by so many states that federal and state authorities finally agreed on a package deal. Abagnale pleaded guilty to Rule 20, which covers all "crimes, known and unknown."

The judge stunned him with a sentence of 72 years!

"I was really floored," Abagnale recalls. "But I had a good lawyer. He took it to higher courts, arguing that about 80 percent of the counts had been crimes committed while I was a juvenile. Eventually, the sentence was reduced to twelve years."

Abagnale was paroled in 1974, and settled in Houston where, two years ago, he conceived the idea of becoming an instructor in white-collar crime. A measure of his success can be gleaned from the fact that when the Rotary Club of Houston had its choice of U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young, Ann Landers or Frank Abagnale as a special speaker, the committee voted for Frank.

Abagnale, under the watchful eye of authorities, sometimes still poses as someone he isn't. In fact, he met his wife, Kelly, and courted her under an assumed name, while working undercover to expose a suspected auditor's fraud within a large charitable organization. "There wasn't any fraud, as it turned out, but at no time could I reveal my actual identity to Kelly," says Frank.

Kelly is a neat woman. She didn't mind at all. In fact, since she was taking her degree at a local university at the time, she wrote her thesis on Frank's escapades.

Kelly's was not the first professional paper on Frank. While he was serving his time in federal prison, a University of Virginia psychiatrist-psychologist-criminologist used Abagnale—with Frank's permission and cooperation—as the subject of a two-year psychological evaluation of the criminal intellect. Frank cheerfully submitted to a continuing series of interrogations, truth-serum injections, polygraph examinations and various other tests.

The university researcher concluded that Frank Abagnale had a low criminal threshold. In other words, he had no business being a crook in the first place.

♦♦♦

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Erin Kelly is not the real name of the person so named in the foregoing story. A fictitious name has been used because there is no reason for public interest in the identity of this person.